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AUTHOR Kendall, Kathleen Edgerton
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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the speaking habits of the general public from the Albany, Schenectady, and Troy (New York) area in the spring and fall of 1984. Student interviewers completed interviews with 478 residents 18 years or older to find out how many times the respondent had given speeches in the past two years and under what circumstances. The results show that (1) between 55% and 63% of the subjects gave at least one speech to ten or more people, with 71% of these speakers giving at least four speeches during that time; (2) people are most likely to give job-related speeches with a mixed (informative and persuasive) intent; and (3) people with more education and income give speeches the most frequently. (EL)

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DO REAL PEOPLE EVER GIVE SPEECHES?

Kathleen Edgerton Kendall

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DO REAL PEOPLE EVER GIVE SPEECHES?

by Kathleen Edgerton Kendall, Department of Communication, SUNY-Albany

Presented to the Applied Communication Division, Eastern Communication Association
Providence, Rhode Island, May 3, 1985

In 1974 I published an article in the Central States Speech Journal on the public speaking habits of blue collar workers and their families in the city of Albany, New York.[1] This paper is an extension of that earlier study, reporting on the public speaking habits of the general public in the Capital District of Albany, Schenectady, and Troy, New York and environs, an area with a population of approximately 750,000 residents.

The results of the earlier study showed that among blue collar workers and their families, almost half, or 46.5 per cent of the subjects, said that they had spoken to ten or more people at least once in the last two years, and those with more education spoke the most frequently. Based on these findings, I hypothesized that a study of the general public would show a larger percentage of people giving speeches, since the average educational level would be higher than that of the blue collar group. I tested this hypothesis in two surveys in the Capital District, one done in March and April, 1984, the second in October, 1984. In the October survey I also investigated the specific nature of the subjects' speaking experience (i.e. what kinds of speaking experiences had they had?).

The Albany, Schenectady, Troy, New York area has a population of approximately 750,000 people. The telephone book for the area includes 185 localities and approximately 229,000 residential telephone numbers.[2] A random sample of names and numbers was drawn from this book both in the spring and fall of 1984. In late March and early April, 1984, trained student interviewers completed telephone interviews with 276 residents of the

area who were 18 years of age or older. In the October, 1984 survey, a trained graduate student in Communication completed 202 telephone interviews with randomly chosen residents of the area.[3] The composition of the samples (sex, years of schooling completed, income, and age) is reported in Table 1.

TABLE 1

SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILE OF SUBJECTS INTERVIEWED

		When Interviewed	Number	%
Sex	Male:	Spring, 1984	132	48%
		Fall, 1984	78	39%
	Female:	Spring, 1984	142	51%
		Fall, 1984	111	55%
	Missing Data:	Spring, 1984	2	1%
		Fall, 1984	13	6%
Education (years completed)	Under 8 years:	Spring, 1984	8	3%
		Fall, 1984	6	3%
	8-12 years:	Spring, 1984	94	34%
		Fall, 1984	105	52%
	13-16 years	Spring, 1984	130	47%
		Fall, 1984	72	36%
	Above 16 years	Spring, 1984	38	14%
		Fall, 1984	17	8%
	No answer	Spring, 1984	6	2%
		Fall, 1984	2	1%
Family income range	Under $10,000	Spring, 1984	30	11%
		Fall, 1984	42	21%
	$10,001-20,000	Spring, 1984	56	20%
		Fall, 1984	42	21%
	$20,001-30,000	Spring, 1984	66	24%
		Fall, 1984	35	17%
	$30,001-40,000	Spring, 1984	47	17%
		Fall, 1984	19	10%
	$40,001-50,000	Spring, 1984	27	10%
		Fall, 1984	6	3%
	Above $50,000	Spring, 1984	16	6%
		Fall, 1984	5	3%
	No answer	Spring, 1984	34	12%
		Fall, 1984	53	25%
			Mean	
Age		Spring, 1984	41.5	
		Fall, 1984	41.2	

The dependent variable in both surveys was the number of times the respondent had given speeches in the last two years. In an effort to determine the extent of each subject's speechmaking, interviewers asked the question, "In the last two years, how many times have you spoken to a group of ten or more people at once?" Over half of the people surveyed said they had spoken to such a group at least once in the last two years. In the spring group 63% had done so; in the fall group 55% had done so (see Table 2).

TABLE 2

NUMBER OF TIMES SUBJECTS SPOKE TO AN AUDIENCE OF TEN OR MORE PERSONS IN THE LAST TWO YEARS

	Four or more times		Three times		Twice		Once		Never		No ans.		Total	
Spring 1984	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	123	44.5%	18	6.5%	20	7%	13	5%	100	36%	2	1%	276	100%
Fall 1984	80	40%	10	4.5%	12	6%	10	4.5%	90	45%	----		202	100%

While the 1974 study had provided an independent check on the reliability of the subjects' answers, the 1984 surveys did not have such a check. But the author has no reason to doubt the subjects' veracity on the topic of their speechmaking. Virtually everyone in the 1984 surveys (99%) answered the question, and there were no apparent signs of embarrassment, confusion, or lying.

Additional information about the speakers and nonspeakers emerged in Pearson r tests between the frequency of speechmaking data and data on the subjects' educational level, age, income, and sex, in chi square tests, and in regression analysis of these data. The Pearson r test of the spring 1984 data showed a significant correlation between speechmaking and education ($r=.40$, $p<.000$), speechmaking and income ($r = .33$, $p<.000$), and speechmaking and age, with younger subjects giving more speeches ($r = -.18$, $p<.003$). The Pearson r results on sex showed no significant correlation.

The chi square results for the cross tabulation between education and sex and frequency of speechmaking were not significant, but there were significant results in the cross tabulation between income and frequency of speechmaking, with the likelihood of speaking increasing with income ($\chi^2 = 30.4$, $p < .05$, df = 15). Table 3 reports these results.

TABLE 3

COMPARISONS BETWEEN SPEECHMAKING FREQUENCY AND SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS - SPRING '84

	Education (N = 269)	Age (N = 263)	Income (N = 242)	Sex (N = 273)
Speechmaking χ^2	χ^2=47.6 p < .16 df = 39	χ^2 = 155.4 p < .43 df = 153	χ^2 = 30.4 p < .05 df = 15	χ^2 = 4.6 p < .20 df = 3
Pearson r	r = .40 p < .000	r = -.18 p < .002	r = .33 p < .000	r = .08 p < .10

Multiple regression techniques were also employed in the analysis because they helped to explain the unique contribution of an independent variable after controlling for the effects of the other variables in the system. The number of times each person had spoken was regressed on the variables of education, income, age, and sex. Table 4 reports these results.

TABLE 4

RESULTS OF THE MULTIPLE REGRESSION OF SPEECHMAKING FREQUENCY - SPRING 1984 (N = 274)

Independent Variable	Multiple R	R^2 Change	Beta	F
Income	.33	.11	.20	10.32*
Education	.44	.09	.30	21.63**
Age	.45	.007	-.08	1.96
Sex	.45	.002	.04	.53
R^2 = .20	F = 14.80	(p < .001)		

*The regression coefficient is statistically significant beyond the .01 level.
**The regression coefficient is statistically significant beyond the .001 level.

The multiple correlation of speechmaking experience on all four independent variables combined is .45, which is statistically significant beyond the .001 level. These four variables explain 20% of the variance of speechmaking experience. Of the four variables, income explains 11% of the variance controlling the effect of the other variables, and education explains 9% of the variance controlling the effect of the other variables. Because income and education were related (those people with the higher incomes tended to have more years of schooling), it is hard to separate these two factors; they play an interrelated role. The results support the hypothesis that education is an important demographic predictor of speechmaking experience. A second major finding in this survey (not found in the 1974 study) is that income is also an important predictor of speechmaking experience.

While it is useful to know that education and income explain almost 20% of the variance of speechmaking frequency, the obvious question now is: what explains the other 80% of the variance? In future research I plan to examine job descriptions and personality types for further understanding of society's speechmakers.

The fall 1984 survey probed to see what kinds of speech situations were most common among the respondents. If subjects indicated that they had spoken to a group in the past two years, the interviewer asked them to describe the kind of speaking situation. The results of these questions appear in Table 5.

TABLE 5

NATURE OF SPEAKING OCCASIONS REPORTED BY SUBJECTS IN FALL 1984

N = 115
(Note: 3 subjects reported several different speaking experiences, raising the total slightly)

	N	%
Speaking at work-related occasions	67	58%
Speaking at club meetings (fraternal organizations, PTO meetings, etc.)	24	21%
Speaking in classroom presentations and discussions (as a student)	10	9%
Speaking at church-related functions	7	6%
Performing	2	2%
Other (at weddings, as a defendant, political speeches, town board)	5	4%

The most striking thing about the findings above is the importance of speaking on the job. When this is combined with the fact that people speak more as their income and education rises, the connection between preparedness for speaking and job success (as measured in income) is strongly suggested.

The exact nature of the speechmaking experiences could not be determined by the answers in this survey. Informative, instructional-type speeches were clearly one important type, however: 42 people or 37% of those who gave speeches metnioned that they spoke to teach or instruct. Some typical informative speech experiences were: "giving health instructions as a nurse," "teaching grade school," "giving instructions at the fire department," "adult education classes," "Cub Scout training," and "safety instructions." Speeches which were persuasive in intent were described by 7 people (6%), who cited experiences such as: "speaking in court as a defendant," "public relations," and religious speeches to groups about "the Word."

The majority of speech experiences seemed to be mixed in their purpose, probably involving informative and persuasive intent and perhaps the intent to entertain as well. People repeatedly said they "spoke out at meetings," and spoke at conferences, committees, and seminars at work as well as in social and religious groups. What kind of speech is one to the PTO? to fellow policemen? to the Elks? in a college class? to the American Legion auxiliary? to a Bible study group? to alcoholics? to the historical society? Of the 115 people who had given speeches, 64 or 56% were in this mixed category of speech types.

DISCUSSION

An examination of the data collected seems to warrant the following conclusions. First, among the general public a majority of people speak to audiences of ten or more people fairly frequently. Between 55% and 63% of the 478 subjects interviewed said they had given at least one such speech in the past two years, and of these speakers, the overwhelming majority (71%) had spoken four or more times. Thus the experience of public speaking (if it is defined as speaking to an audience of ten or more people at once) remains a very common one in our society.

Second, people are more likely to give speeches on the job than any other place. Of the subjects questioned in fall 1984, 58% of those who spoke in public did so at work, with the second most common place being at club meetings (21%). The type of speech given, whatever the location, is most likely to mix informative and persuasive speaking (56%).[4] The "instructional," teaching-type informative speech is also very common, and was mentioned by 37% of the subjects.

Third, those people with more education and income give speeches the most frequently. Since we already know that they are most likely to speak on the

job, the interconnectedness between higher income and education and success speaking on the job is suggested. Knowing about such connections, a person who wants a high income job would be wise to get a good education and prepare to speak well.

The results of this study both confirm and extend the results of the 1974 study of speechmaking by blue collar workers. As the 1974 study showed, real people do give speeches, and they are more likely to do so as their level of education increases. In addition we have learned that they are most likely to give speeches in their workplace, both informative and persuasive speeches. Income, as well as education, is related to their speechmaking, with the likelihood of having to speak to audiences increasing with income.

There is still a great deal to be learned about the kind of people who do the most public speaking in our society. This research showed that years of schooling completed and income are key determinants of public speaking, but those two demographic factors explain only 20% of the variance. Future research should look more closely at the nature of the education, jobs, and personalities of the speakers for a more complete picture of the public speaker in America.

Footnotes

[1] Kathleen Edgerton Kendall, "Do Real People Ever Give Speeches?" Central States Speech Journal XXV (Fall 1974), 233-235.

[2] New York Telephone, 1984.

[3] The author wishes to thank Robert Stokem, M.A. student in the Department of Communication, SUNY-Albany, for his work as an interviewer, and Jong Young Lee, Ph.D. student, Department of Communication, University of Southern California, for his assistance with the computer analysis of the results.

[4] This matter merits more investigation. The subjects' answers to the questions about the nature of their speechmaking were vague in many cases, and my conclusions about the types of speeches need more specific proof.